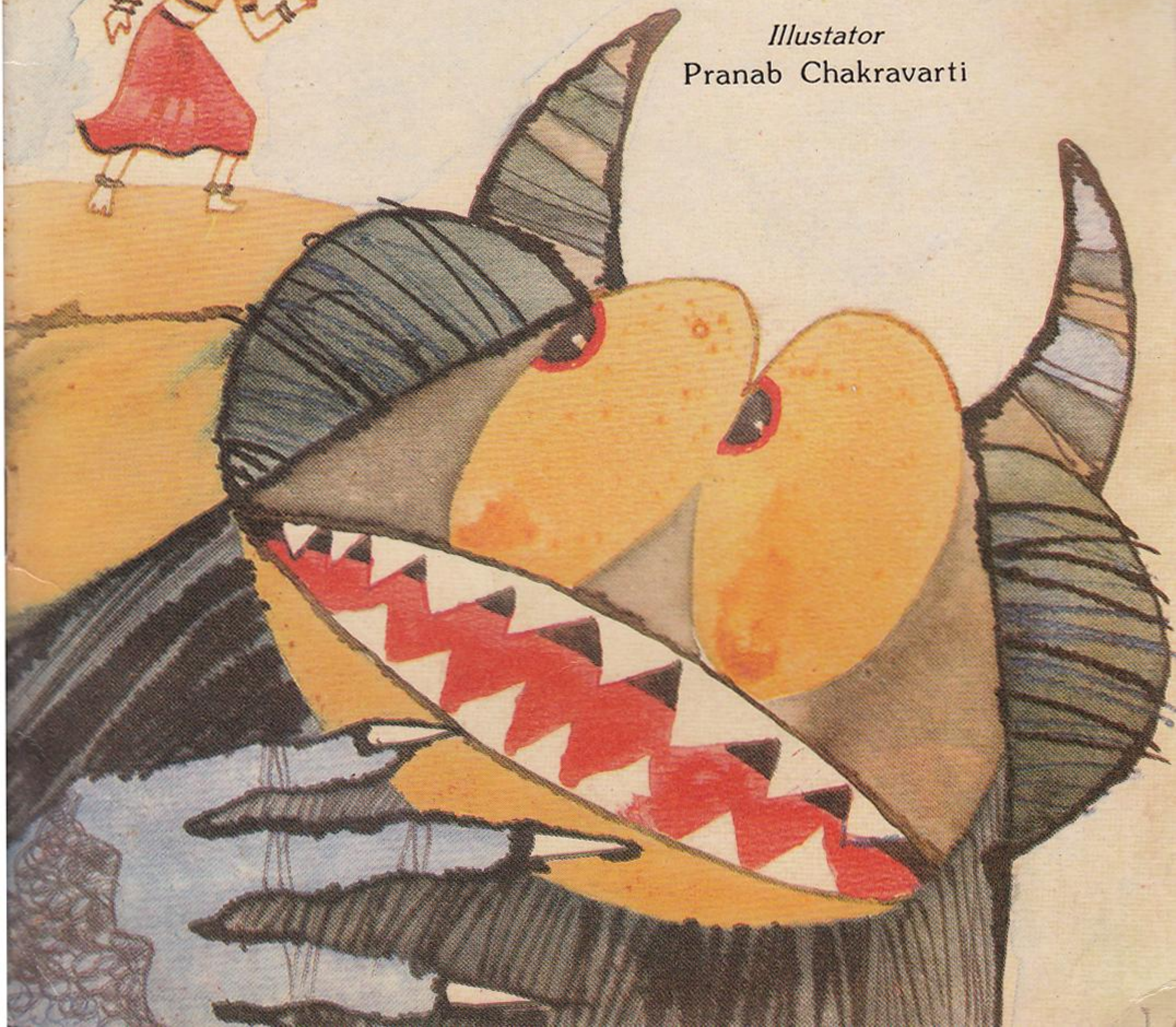




Mohini and the Demon

Shanta Rameshwar Rao

Illustrator
Pranab Chakravarti



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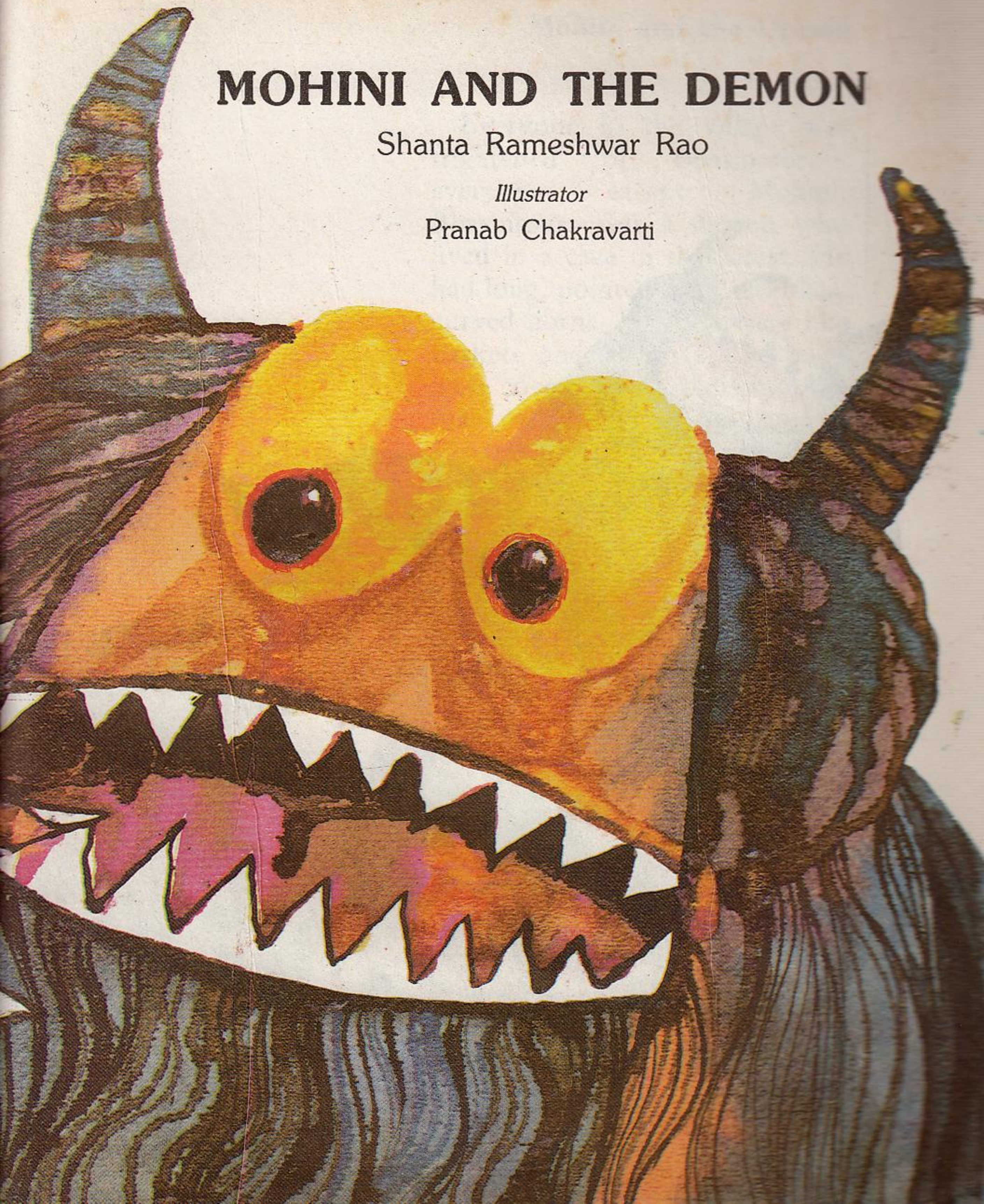
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MOHINI AND THE DEMON

Shanta Ramaswami

Ronald G. ...



Mohini and the Demon

Everyone in the village was frightened of Bhasmasura—everyone except Mohini. Bhasmasura was a demon who lived in a cave in the forest. He had long, pointed teeth and black curved horns. His ears were like baskets and his face and body were covered with thick hair. All that wouldn't have mattered if Bhasmasura had been a friendly, good demon. But he was far from being friendly. Quite the opposite! Bhasmasura delighted in frightening people. And when he was hungry (and even when he wasn't) he thought nothing of gobbling them up.

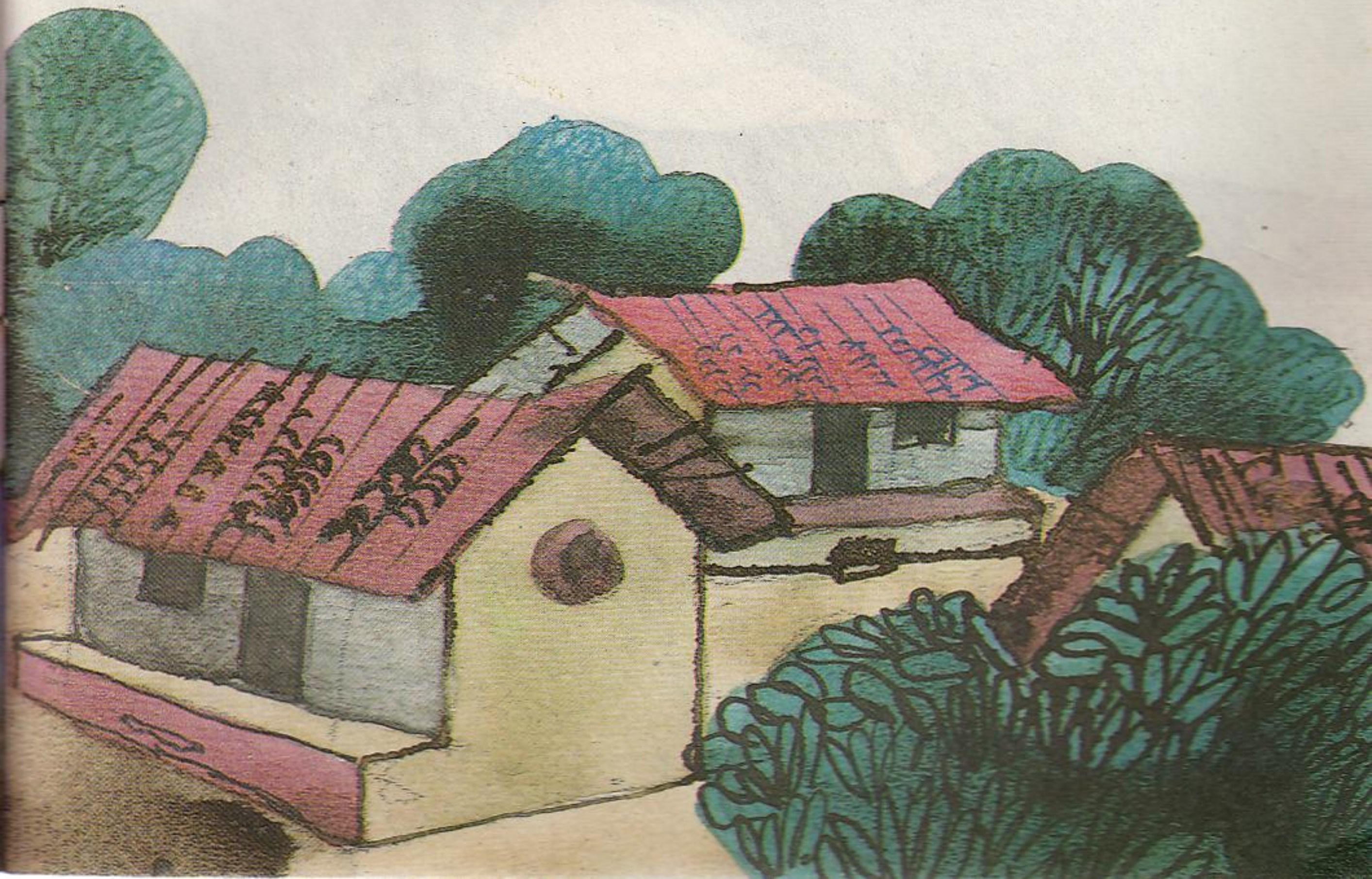


Bhasmasura had a magical power. That really- was the trouble with him. If he put his hand on someone's head, the person would turn into a handful of ash. Was it surprising that everyone was frightened of him? They fled the moment they saw him and Bhasmasura roared with laughter to see



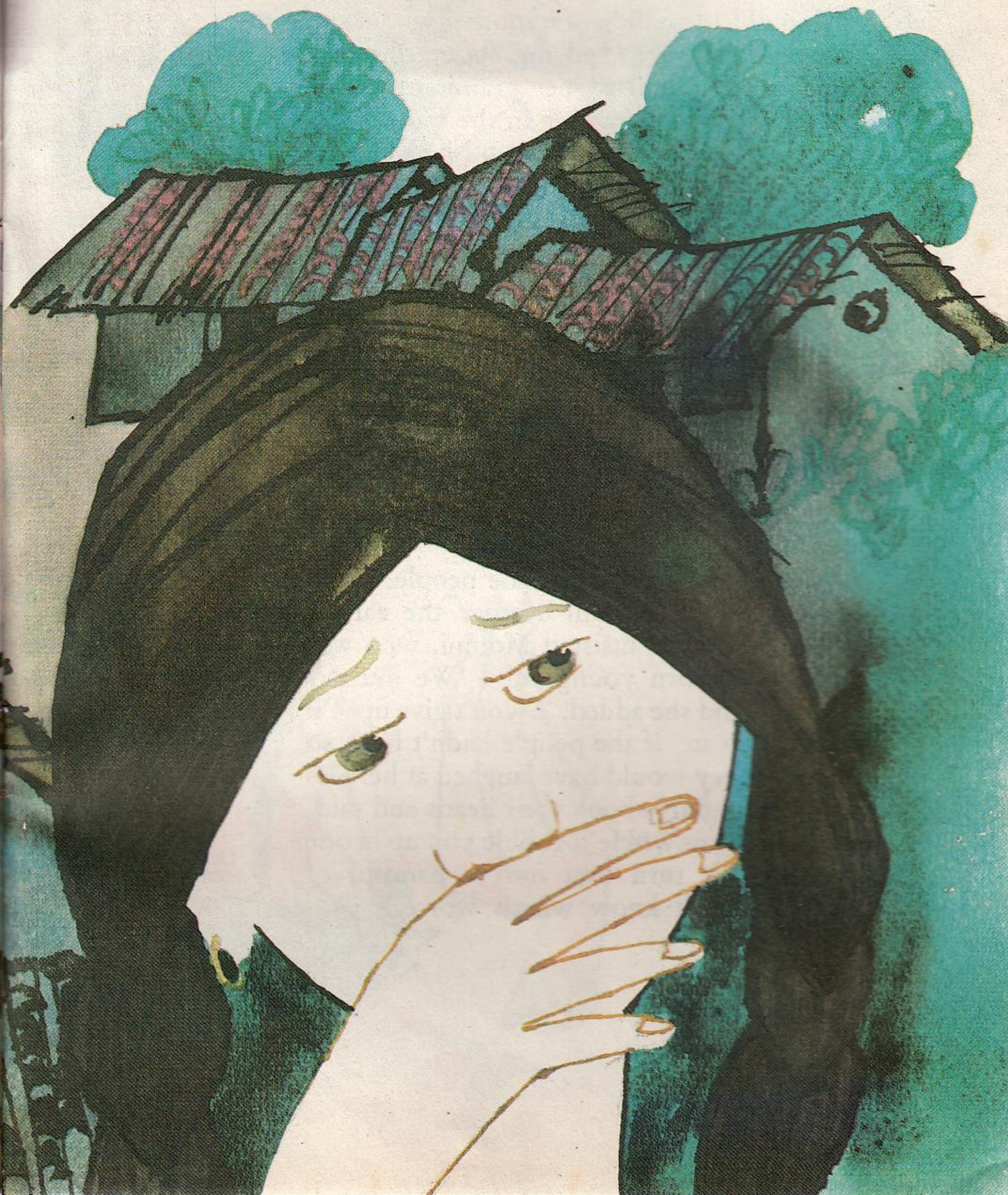
them run. 'Ha, ha, ho, ho!' There's no one to equal me in the whole world,' he boasted.

It was only after they were sure he had gone that people crept out of their hiding places, quaking with fear. All except Mohini. She shook her head, frowned thoughtfully and said to herself, 'I'm sure there's a way out of this. I'm



quite, quite sure. If only we could find it.' And she thought hard while everyone got more and more desperate with each passing day. 'You don't know Bhasmasura,' they told Mohini. 'He is as old as the hills and no one can kill him. How can they? He has this magic power. All he has to do is clap his hand over your head and that's the end of you. You just turn into a handful of ash. That's why people have stopped even trying to fight Bhasmasura.'





Mohini had an old grandmother whom she visited every day. 'Tell me about Bhasmasura,' said Mohini to her grandmother.

'He lives in a dark cave in the mountains,' her grandmother told her, 'and he walks up and down the countryside, uprooting trees and trampling over fields. He brings destruction wherever he goes. He has the strength of twenty elephants. Everyone is frightened of Bhasmasura's magic power.'

'I'm not!' said Mohini to her grandmother, and 'I'm not!' she said to the villagers.

'You ought to be,' said the villagers severely. 'You are a foolish girl and you don't know what you are saying.' But Mohini was sure that she could find some way to deal with Bhasmasura.

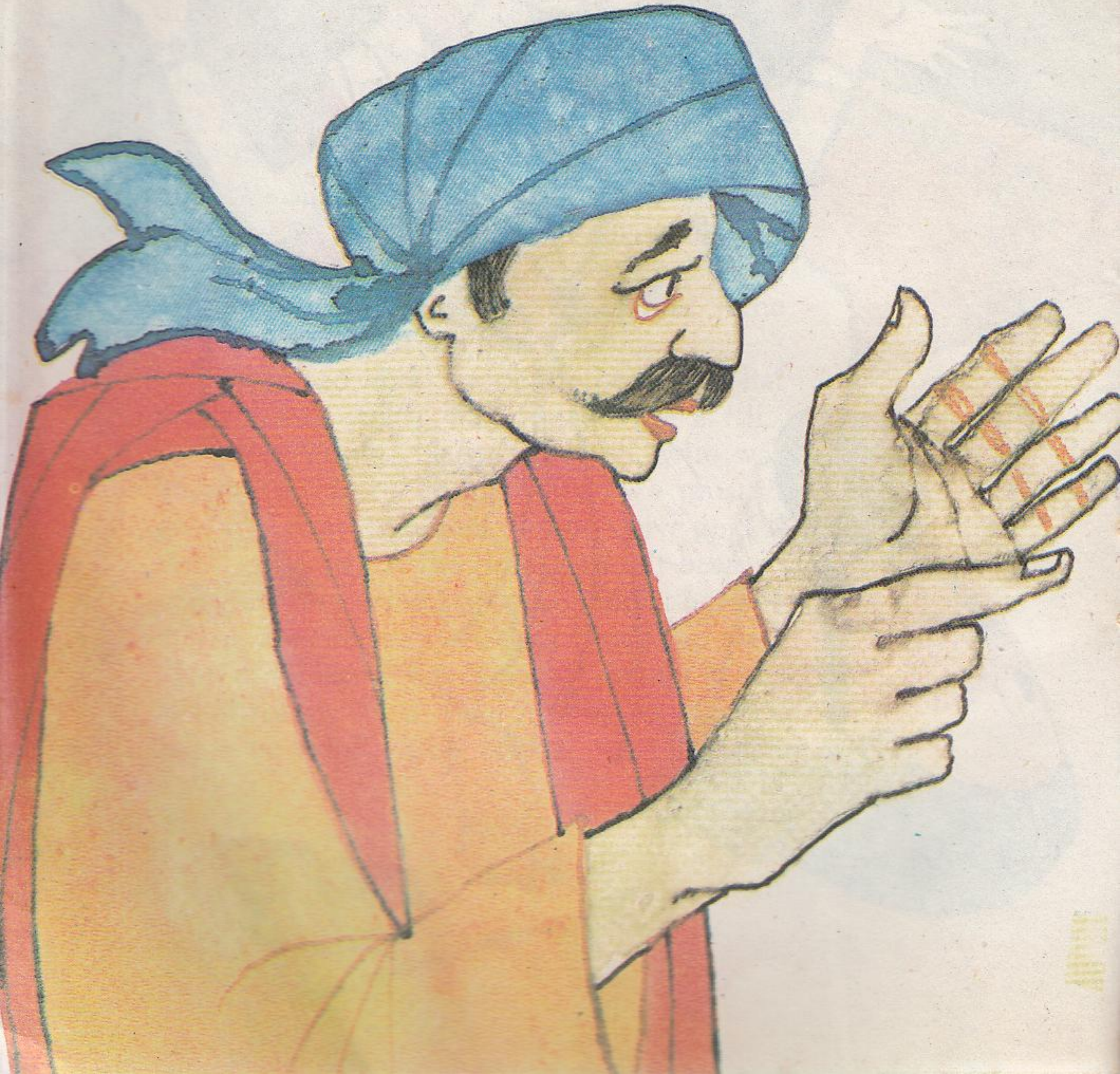
'There's no way!' wept the people. 'That magic hand of his will destroy the earth.'

'No, it won't,' insisted Mohini, who was quite a stubborn young lady. 'We mustn't give up.' And she added, 'I won't give up. I'll think about it.' If the people hadn't been so unhappy they would have laughed at her. As it was, they only shook their heads and said, 'You don't know! He'll gobble you up in one mouthful or turn you into a handful of ash—we don't know what's worse.'





'I don't think so,' answered Mohini. She thought about the problem for many weeks then one day she went to the headman of the village. He was sitting on the veranda of his house surrounded by the village elders.



‘Please, Sir,’ said Mohini. ‘Let me deal with Bhasmasura. I’m sure I can.’

‘Don’t be silly!’ frowned the elders. ‘You are foolish and foolhardy.’ And one elder added, ‘Perhaps you are joking?’

‘I’m not!’ Mohini answered. ‘I’m serious!’


‘Well,’ the headman said at last. ‘And how will you go about it, Mohini?’

‘I’ll dance!’ said Mohini.

‘Dance?’ cried the astonished elders. ‘Are you mad?’

‘No, I’m not,’ Mohini answered calmly. ‘Please, Sir, give me a pair of tinkling anklets and allow me to go to Bhasmasura’s cave.’





At first the headman wouldn't hear of it. 'Nonsense!' he said. 'It's madness. Bhasmasura will clap his hand over your head and that will be the end of you.' But Mohini begged and begged. She was so determined that at last the headman gave in.

'Very well, then, but don't say we didn't warn you,' said the elders, as she set off.

'No I won't,' said Mohini, waving them goodbye. 'Just wish me luck.'

Mohini travelled many miles, walking most of the way and sometimes taking a lift in a bullock-cart or a ride on a donkey. She crossed a river in a boat and another on a raft, and everywhere she heard people talk about the wickedness of Bhasmasura and his magic power. And everywhere she saw how scared people were.

'You won't be able to do anything about him,' they told her. 'He's too strong.'

'Well,' said Mohini. 'I'll try. It won't help to sit doing nothing, will it?'



At last she reached Bhasmasura's cave in the mountains. She knew it at once because there were bones and bits of rotting flesh lying about.

Mohini stood at the entrance and for the first time felt frightened. It was very silent. Not a leaf stirred, not a bird sang, not an insect buzzed.

'Oh dear,' she thought. 'What's going to happen now? Maybe the villagers were right. Maybe the demon will turn me into a handful of ash and then — and then — that will be the end of me. Maybe I shouldn't have come...' But Mohini thought of this with only one part of her mind. Another part whispered, 'Now you're here you should at least peep in and see what Bhasmasura looks like. Has he really got horns on his head?'





So Mohini moved forward a little bit, very cautiously, stood on tip-toe at the mouth of the cave, and peeped in. It was very dark inside and she couldn't see anything. She stood there for quite a while but there was no sign of the demon.

'Why, maybe there's no Bhasmasura after all,' she thought. 'Maybe someone made him up—' Suddenly 'GRRR—WAAW—GRRR—WAAW!' Mohini heard a great roar and then there was a mighty BANG—CRASH—BANG. The demon was standing right behind her! He had just returned from one of his wanderings. 'GRRR—WAAW—GRRR' he roared again. Mohini stood there facing him. She couldn't do anything else. 'There's no escape now!' she thought. 'I'd better deal with him as best I can.'

'GRRR—WAAW' went the demon again, and the earth shook. But Mohini stood her ground.

'WHO ARE YOU?' bellowed the monster, and Mohini answered, 'My name is Mohini.'

'EEEH—OW—OW—EEEH—OW!' shrieked the demon. 'HOW DARE YOU COME TO MY CAVE?'







'Well,' said Mohini. 'I heard how handsome and strong and intelligent you are, so I came to see you.'

Now that was a clever thing to say, for Bhasmasura was pleased. He began to grin. He had a fearful grin, all his big, long teeth showed. But he was pleased. He liked being called handsome. He thought, 'This girl is good-looking.'



She would make me a worthy wife.' He looked her up and down and then down and up. At last he said, 'Will you marry me, Mohini?'

'Marry you?' asked Mohini. After a short pause she said, 'Yes, Bhasmasura, I'll marry you.'



Bhasmasura's grin grew wider, showing many more teeth.

'Yes, Bhasmasura, I'll marry you,' Mohini repeated. Then she added wagging her forefinger, 'But on one condition: you dance with me and exactly follow every step and movement I make. If you miss the smallest movement I won't marry you.'





'Ho! Ho! Is that all!' bellowed Bhasmasura. 'That's not difficult.'

'Very well then,' called Mohini and began to dance. Bhasmasura looked at her and he began to dance, too.

'I must follow every movement of hers,' he muttered to himself. 'I must make no mistake.'



Mohini fluttered her eyelids
and Bhasmasura fluttered his.





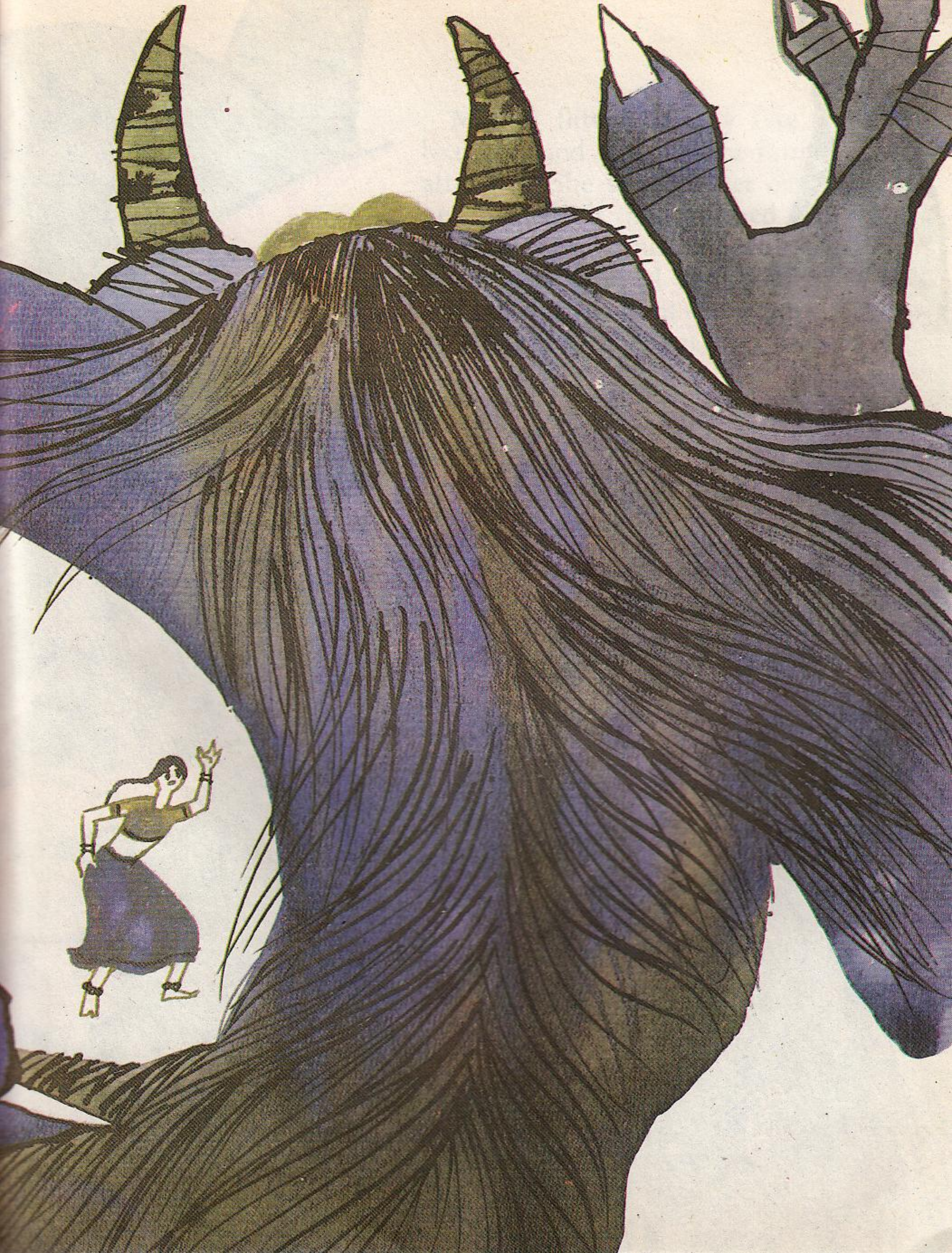


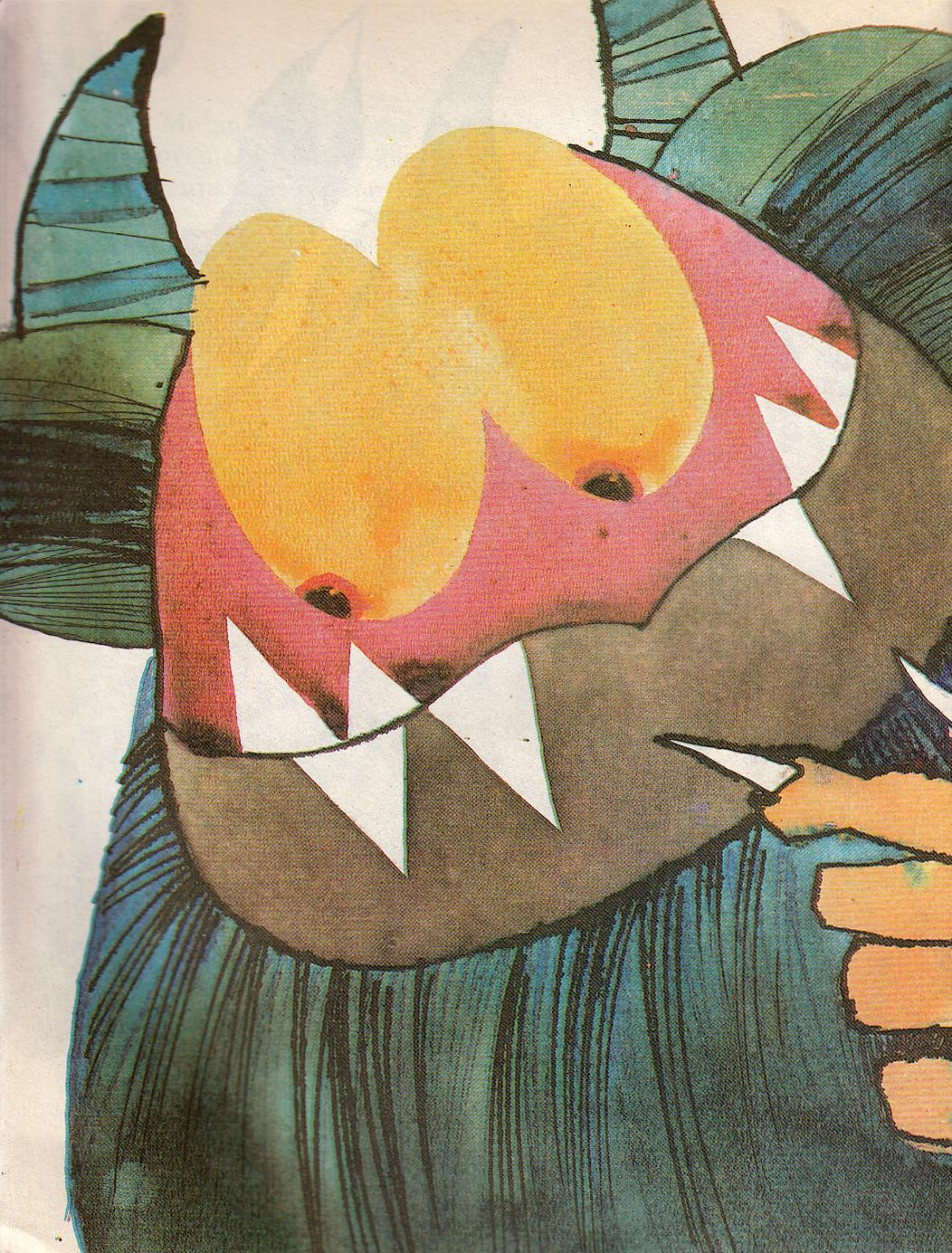
Mohini cupped her hands to
make a lotus and the demon
cupped his to make a lotus.



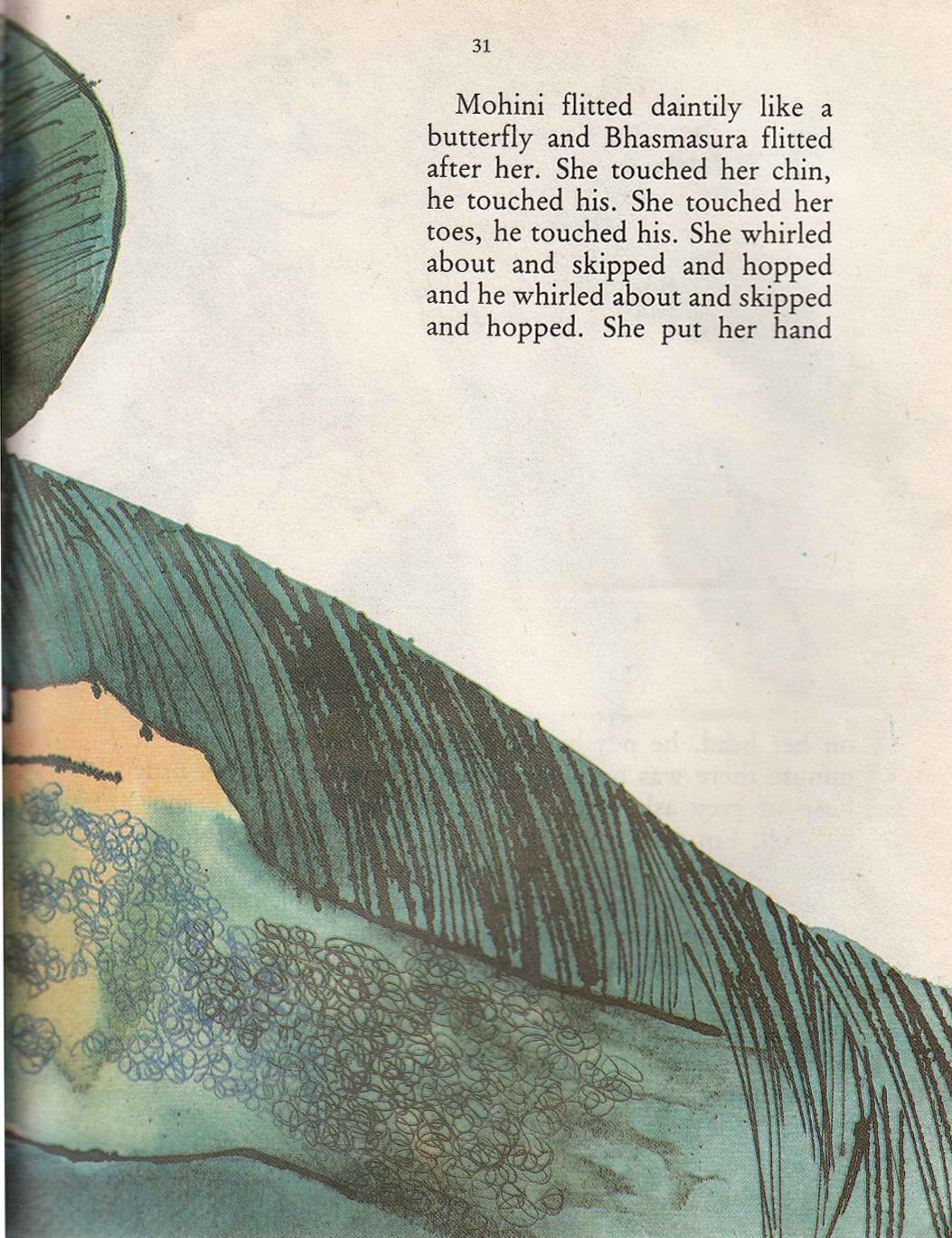
Mohini made the swaying
movements of an elephant and
Bhasmasura did the same.







Mohini flitted daintily like a butterfly and Bhasmasura flitted after her. She touched her chin, he touched his. She touched her toes, he touched his. She whirled about and skipped and hopped and he whirled about and skipped and hopped. She put her hand





on her head, he put his hand on his head and—the next minute there was no Bhasmasura! There was only a little heap of grey ash where the demon had stood.

‘Well, I’m glad we’re rid of him,’ said Mohini. ‘Now I must go home or grandmother will worry.’

She hadn’t walked far when crowds of people came from all sides to meet and greet her. They had heard the great news. The headman declared a holiday. Everyone wore their finest clothes.

‘Jai, Jai!’ they shouted. ‘Jai to Mohini, brave, gallant, Mohini.’ Laughing and talking, they lifted Mohini on to their shoulders and carried her home in triumph to the village.





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